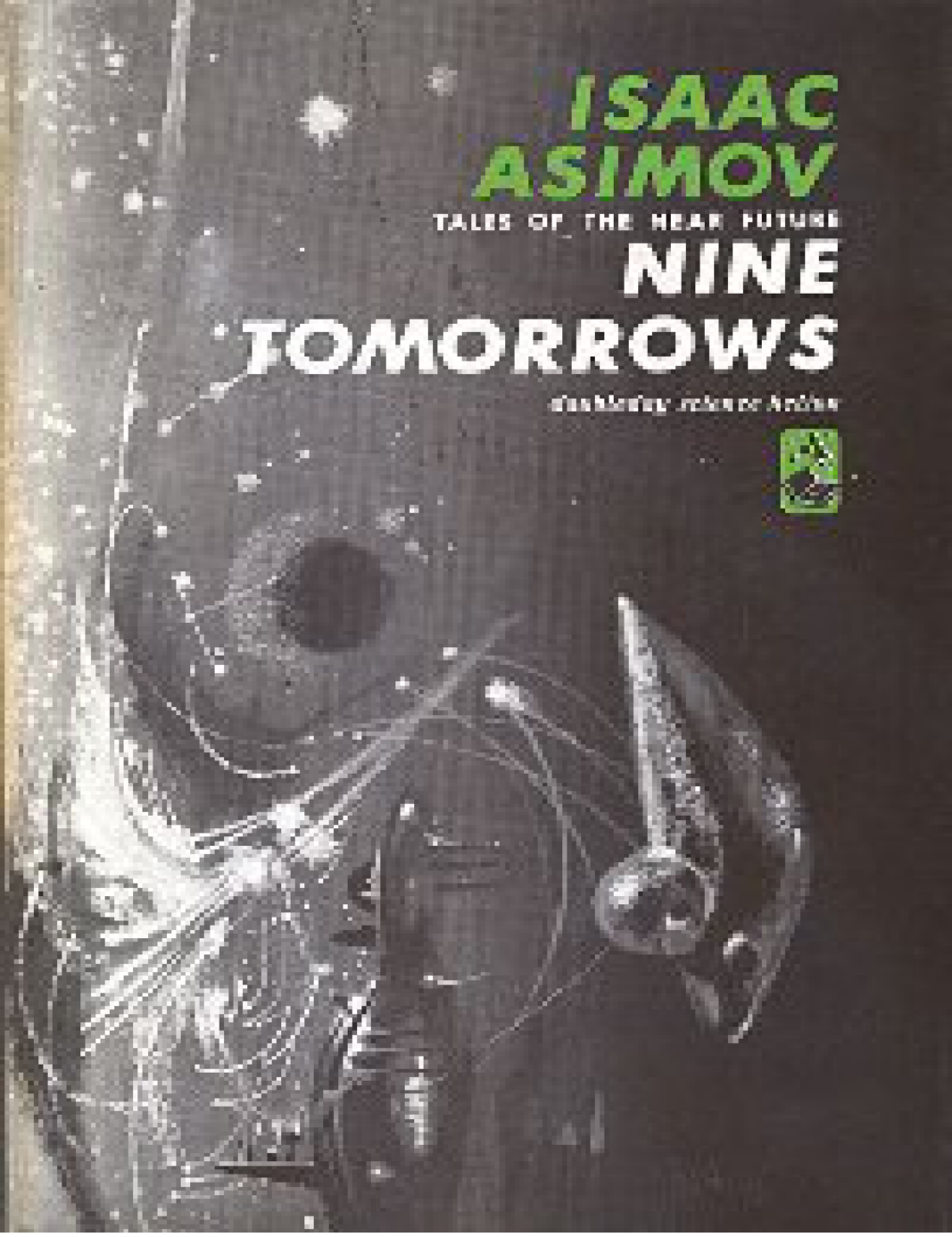
ISAAC
ASIMOV
TALES OF THE NEAR FUTURE
NINE
TOMORROWS

SHOUT
SHARE
IT

Annotation

From Robert Silverberg's "Earthmen and Strangers" anthology, 1966:

Randall Garrett's story examined, from the viewpoint of the Earthmen, a possible encounter between our species and hostile aliens. In the story that follows, Isaac Asimov handles the same theme from the viewpoint of the aliens themselves. Suppose, he says, strangers from afar have been watching us for years. Suppose, too, that they are the overlords of a galactic empire, eager to add us to their dominion. How will they react, though, when they learn what sort of creatures we Earthmen really are? To them, we are the aliens—and we are terribly, frighteningly alien.

Isaac Asimov, one of the science fiction's ablest practitioners, rarely deals with galactic matters these days. The Boston-based Dr. Asimov, who taught biochemistry while writing such famed s-f novels as The Currents of Space and The Caves of Steel, now devotes himself to science fact with equal success. Though jovial and even boisterous in the flesh, Asimov is scholarly behind the typewriter, and he's won acclaim for such standard reference items as *The Intelligent Man's Guide to Science* and *Asimov's Biographical Encyclopedia of Science and Technology*.

- The Gentle Vultures

The Gentle Vultures
by Isaac Asimov

For fifteen years now, the Hurrians had maintained their base on the other side of the Moon.

It was unprecedented, unheard of. No Hurrian had dreamed it possible to be delayed so long. The decontamination squads had been ready—ready and waiting for fifteen years, ready to swoop down through the radioactive clouds and save what might be saved for the remnant of survivors. In return, of course, for fair payment.

But fifteen times, the planet had revolved about its sun. During each revolution, the satellite had rotated thirteen times about the primary. And in all that time the nuclear war had not come.

Nuclear bombs were exploded by the large-primate intelligences at various points on the planet's surface. The planet's stratosphere had grown amazingly warm with radioactive refuse. But still no war.

Devi-en hoped ardently that he would be replaced. He was the fourth Captain-in-charge of this colonizing expedition (if it could still be called so after fifteen years of suspended animation), and he was quite content that there should be a fifth. Now that the home world was sending an Archadministrator to make a personal survey of the situation, his replacement might come soon. Good!

He stood on the surface of the Moon, encased in his space suit, and thought of home, of Hurria. His long, thin arms moved restlessly with the thought, as though aching (through millions of years of instinct) for the ancestral trees. He stood only three feet high. What could be seen of him through the glass-fronted head plate was a black and wrinkled face with the fleshy, mobile nose dead-centered. The little tuft of fine beard was a pure white in contrast. In the rear of the suit, just below center, was the bulge within which the short and stuffy Human tail might rest comfortably.

Devi-en took his appearance for granted, of course, but was well aware of the difference between the Hurrians and all the other intelligences in the Galaxy. The Hurrians alone were so small; they alone were tailed; they alone were vegetarians; they alone had escaped the inevitable nuclear war that had ruined every other known intelligent species.

He stood on the walled plain that extended for so many miles that the raised and circular rim (which on Hurria would have been called a crater, if it were smaller) was invisible beyond the horizon. Against the southern edge of the rim, where there was always some protection against the direct rays of the sun, a city had grown. It had begun as a

temporary camp, of course, but with the years, women had been brought in, and children had been born. Now there were schools and elaborate hydroponics establishments, large water reservoirs, all that went with a city on an airless world.

It was ridiculous! All because one planet had nuclear weapons and would not fight a nuclear war.

The Archadministrator, who would be arriving soon, would undoubtedly ask, almost at once, the same question that Devi-en had asked himself a wearisome number of times.

Why had there not been a nuclear war?

Devi-en watched the hulking Mauvs preparing the ground now for the landing, smoothing out the unevennesses and laying down the ceramic bed designed to absorb the hyper-atomic field-thrusts with minimum discomfort to the passengers within the ship.

Even in their space suits, the Mauvs seemed to exude power, but it was the power of muscle only. Beyond them was the little figure of a Hurrian giving orders, and the docile Mauvs obeyed. Naturally.

The Mauvian race, of all the large-primate intelligences, paid their fees in the most unusual coin, a quota of themselves, rather than of material goods. It was a surprisingly useful tribute, better than steel, aluminum, or fine drugs in many ways.

Devi-en's receiver stuttered to life. "The ship is sighted, sir," came the report. "It will be landing within the hour."

"Very good," said Devi-en. "Have my car made ready to take me to the ship as soon as landing is initiated."

He did not feel that it was very good at all.

The Archadministrator came flanked by a personal retinue of five Mauvs. They entered the city with him, two on each side, three following. They helped him off with his space suit, then removed their own.

Their thinly haired bodies, their large, coarse-featured faces, their broad noses and flat cheekbones were repulsive but not frightening. Though twice the height of the Hurrians and more than twice the breadth, there was a blankness about their eyes, something completely submissive about the way they stood, with their thick-sinewed necks slightly bent, their bulging arms hanging listlessly.

The Archadministrator dismissed them, and they trooped out. He did not really need their protection, of course, but his position required a retinue of five, and that was that.

No business was discussed during the meal or during the almost endless ritual of welcome. At a time that might have been more appropriate for sleeping, the Archadministrator passed small fingers through his tuft of beard and said, "How much longer must we wait for this planet, Captain?"

He was visibly advancing in age. The hah" on his upper arms was grizzled, and the tufts at the elbows were almost as white as his beard.

"I cannot say, your Height," said Devi-en, humbly. "They have not followed the path."

'That is obvious. The point is, *why* have they not followed the path? It is clear to the Council that your reports promise more than they deliver. You talk of theories, but you give no details. Now we are tired of all this back on Hurria. If you know of anything you have not told us, now is the time to talk of it."

"The matter, your Height, is hard to prove. We have had no experience of spying on a people over such an extended period. Until recently, we weren't watching for the right things. Each year we kept expecting the nuclear war the year after, and it is only in my time as Captain that we have taken to studying the people more intensively. It is at least one benefit of the long waiting time that we have learned some of their principal languages."

"Indeed? Without even landing on their planet?"

Devi-en explained. "A number of radio messages were recorded by those of our ships that penetrated the planetary atmosphere on observation missions, particularly in the early years. I set our linguistics computers to work on them, and for the last year I have been attempting to make sense out of it all."

The Archadministrator stared. His bearing was such that any outright exclamation of surprise would have been superfluous. "And have you learned anything of interest?"

"I may have, your Height, but what I have worked out is so strange and the underpinning of actual evidence is so uncertain that I dared not speak of it officially in my reports."

The Archadministrator "understood. He said, stiffly, "Would you object to explaining your views unofficially—to me."

"I would be glad to," said Devi-en, at once. "The inhabitants of this planet are, of course, large-primate in nature. And they are competitive."

The other blew out his breath in a kind of relief and passed his-tongue quickly over his nose. "I had a queer notion," he muttered, "that they might *not* be competitive and that that might—But go on, go on."

"They *are* competitive," Devi-en assured him. "Much more so than one would expect on the average."

"Then why doesn't everything else follow?"

"Up to a point it does, your Height. After the usual long incubation period, they began to mechanize, and after that, the usual large-primate killings became truly destructive warfare. At the conclusion of the most recent large-scale war, nuclear weapons were

developed and the war ended at once."

The Archadministrator nodded. "And then?"

Devi-en said. "What should have happened was that a nuclear war ought to have begun shortly afterward, and that in the course of the war, nuclear weapons would have developed quickly in destructiveness, have been used nevertheless in typical large-primate fashion, and have quickly reduced the population to starving remnants in a ruined world."

"Of course, but that didn't happen. Why not?"

Devi-en said, "There is one point. I believe these people, once mechanization started, developed at an unusually high rate."

"And if so?" said the other. "Does that matter? They reached nuclear weapons the more quickly."

"True. But after the most recent general war, they continued to develop nuclear weapons at an unusual rate. That's the trouble. The deadly potential had increased before the nuclear war had a chance to start, and now it has reached a point where even large-primate intelligences dare not risk a war."

The Archadministrator opened his small black eyes wide. "But that is impossible. I don't care how technically talented these creatures are. Military science advances rapidly only during a war."

"Perhaps that is not true in the case of these particular creatures. But even if it were, it seems they *are* having a war; not a real war, but a war."

"Not a real war, but a war," repeated the Archadministrator blankly. "What does that mean?"

"I'm not sure." Devi-en wiggled his nose in exasperation. "This is where my attempts to draw logic out of the scattered material we have picked up is least satisfactory. This planet has something called a Cold War. Whatever it is, it drives them furiously onward in research, and yet it does not involve complete nuclear destruction."

The Archadministrator said, "Impossible!"

Devi-en said, "There is the planet. Here we are. We have been waiting fifteen years."

The Archadministrator's long arms came up and crossed over his head and down again to the opposite shoulders. "Then there *is* only one thing to do. The Council has considered the possibility that the planet may have achieved a stale mate, a kind of uneasy peace that balances just short of a nuclear war. Something of the sort you describe though no one suggested the actual reasons you advance. But it's something we can't allow."

"No, your Height?"

"No." He seemed almost in pain. "The longer the stalemate continues, the greater the possibility that large-primate individuals

may discover the methods of interstellar travel. They will leak out into the Galaxy in full competitive strength. You see?"

"Then?"

The Archadministrator hunched his head deeper into his arms, as though not wishing to hear what he himself must say. His voice was a little muffled. "If they are balanced precariously, we must push them a little, Captain. We must push them."

Devi-en's stomach churned, and he suddenly tasted his dinner once more in the back of his throat. "Push them, your Height?" He didn't want to understand.

But the Archadministrator put it bluntly: "We must help them start their nuclear war." He looked as miserably sick as Devi-en felt. He whispered, "We must!"

Devi-en could scarcely speak. He said, in a whisper, "But how could such a thing be done, your Height?"

"I don't know how. And do not look at *me* so. It is not my decision. It is the decision of the Council. Surely you understand what would happen to the Galaxy if a large-primate intelligence were to enter space in full strength without having been tamed by nuclear war."

Devi-en shuddered at the thought. All that competitiveness loosed on the Galaxy. He persisted, though. "But *how* does one start a nuclear war? How is it done?"

"I don't know, I tell you. But there must be some way; perhaps a —a message we might send or a—a crucial rainstorm we might start by cloud seeding. We could manage a great deal with their weather conditions—"

"How would that start a nuclear war?" said Devi-en, unimpressed.

"Maybe it wouldn't. I mention such a thing only as a possible example. But large primates would know. After all, they are the ones who *do* start nuclear wars in actual fact. It is in their brain pattern to know. That is the decision the Council came to."

Devi-en felt the soft noise his tail made as it thumped slowly against the chair. He tried to stop it and failed. "What decision, your Height?"

"To trap a large-primate from the planet's surface. To kidnap one."

"A *wild* one?"

"It's the only kind that exists at the moment on the planet. Of course, a wild one."

"And what do you expect him to tell us?"

"That doesn't matter, Captain. As long as he says enough about anything, mentalic analysis will give us the answer."

Devi-en withdrew his head as far as he could into the space

between his shoulder blades. The skin just under his armpits quivered with repulsion. A wild large-primate being! He tried to picture one, untouched by the stunning aftermath of nuclear war, unaltered by the civilizing influence of Human eugenic breeding.

The Archadministrator made no attempt to hide the fact that he shared the repulsion, but he said, "You will have to lead the trapping expedition, Captain. It is for the good of the Galaxy."

Devi-en had seen the planet a number of times before, but each time a ship swung about the Moon and placed the world in his line of sight, a wave of unbearable homesickness swept him.

It was a beautiful planet, so like Hurria itself in dimensions and characteristics but wilder and grander. The sight of it, after the desolation of the Moon, was like a blow.

How many other planets like it were on Human master listings at this moment? he wondered. How many other planets were there concerning which meticulous observers had reported seasonal changes in appearance that could be interpreted only as being caused by artificial cultivation of food plants? How many times in the future would a day come when the radioactivity in the stratosphere of one of these planets would begin to climb, when colonizing squadrons would have to be sent out at once. As they were to this planet.

It was almost pathetic, the confidence with which the Hurrians had proceeded at first. Devi-en could have laughed, as he read through those initial reports, if he weren't trapped in this project himself now. The Hurrian scout ships had moved close to gather geographical information, to locate population centers. They were sighted, of course, but what did it matter? Any time, now, they thought, the final explosion.

Any time… But useless years had passed, and the scout ships wondered if they ought not to be cautious. They moved back.

Devi-en's ship was cautious now. All the crew was on edge because of the unpleasantness of the mission; not all Devi-en's assurances that there was no harm intended to the large-primate could quite calm them. Even so, they could not hurry matters. It had to be over a fairly deserted and uncultivated tract of uneven ground that they hovered. They stayed at a height of ten miles for days, while the crew became edgier and only the ever-stolid Mauvs maintained calm.

Then the scope showed them a creature, alone on the uneven ground, a long staff in one hand, a pack across the upper portion of his back.

They lowered silently, supersonically. Devi-en himself, skin crawling, was at the controls.

The creature was heard to say two definite things before he was taken, and they were the first comments recorded for use in mentalic

computing.

The first, when the large-primate caught sight of the ship almost upon him, was picked up by the direction telemike. It was "My God! A flying saucer!"

Devi-en understood the first phrase. That was a term for the Human ships that had grown common among the large-primates those first careless years.

The second remark was made when the wild creature was brought in to the ship, struggling with amazing strength, but helpless in the iron grip of the unperturbed Mauvs.

Devi-en, panting, with his fleshly nose quivering slightly, advanced to receive him and the creature (whose unpleasantly hairless face had become oily with some sort of fluid secretion) yelled, "Holy Toledo, a *monkey1"*

Again, Devi-en understood the second part. It was the word for little-primate in one of the chief languages of the planet.

The wild creature was almost impossible to handle. He required infinite patience before he could be spoken to reasonably. At first, there was nothing but a series of crises. The creature realized almost at once that he was being taken off Earth, and what Devi-en thought might prove an exciting experience for him proved nothing of the sort. He talked instead of his offspring and of a large-primate female.

They have wives and children, thought Devi-en compassionately, and, in their way, love them, for all they are large-primates.

Then he had to be made to understand that the Mauvs who kept him under guard and who restrained him when his violence made that necessary would not hurt him, that he was not to be damaged in any way.

Devi-en was sickened at the thought that one intelligent being might be damaged by another. It was very difficult to discuss the subject, even if only to admit the possibility long enough to deny it. The creature from the planet treated the very hesitation with great suspicion. It was the way the large-primates were.

On the fifth day, when, out of sheer exhaustion perhaps, the creature remained quiet over a fairly extended period, they talked in Devi-en's private quarters, and suddenly he grew angry again when the Human first explained, matter-of-factly, that they were waiting for a nuclear war.

"Waiting!" cried the creature. "What makes you so sure there will be one?"

Devi-en wasn't sure, of course, but he said, "There is always a nuclear war. It is our purpose to help you afterward."

"Help us *afterward*." His words grew incoherent. He waved his arms violently, and the Mauvs who flanked him had to restrain him

gently once again and lead him away.

Devi-en sighed. The creature's remarks were building in quantity and perhaps mentalics could do something with them. His own unaided mind could make nothing of it.

And meanwhile the creature was not thriving. His body was almost completely hairless, a fact that long-distance observation had not revealed owing to the artificial skins worn by them. This was either for warmth or because of an instinctive repulsion on the part even of these particular large-primates themselves for hairless skin. It might be an interesting subject to take up. Mentalics computation could make as much out of one set of remarks as another.

Strangely enough, the creature's face had begun to sprout hair; more in fact than the Human face had and of a dark color.

But still, the central fact was that he was not thriving. He had grown thinner because he was eating poorly and if he was kept too long, his health might suffer. Devi-en had no wish to feel responsible for that.

On the next day, the large-primate seemed quite calm. He talked almost eagerly, bringing the subject around to nuclear warfare almost at once. It had a terrible attraction for the large-primate mind, Devi-en thought. The creature said, "You said nuclear wars always happen. Does that mean there are other people than yours and mine—and theirs?" He indicated the nearby Mauvs.

"There are thousands of intelligent species, living on thousands of worlds. Many thousands," said Devi-en.

"And they all have nuclear wars?"

"All who have reached a certain stage of technology. All but us. We were different. We lacked competitiveness. We had the cooperative instinct."

"You mean you know that nuclear wars will happen and you do nothing about it?"

"We *do"* said Devi-en, pained. "Of course, we do. We try to help. In the early history of my people, when we first developed space travel, we did not understand large-primates. They repelled our attempts at friendship, and we stopped trying. Then we found worlds in radioactive ruins. Finally, we found one world actually in the process of a nuclear war. We were horrified but could do nothing. Slowly, we learned. We are ready, now, at every world we discover to be at the nuclear stage. We are ready with decontamination equipment and eugenic analyzers."

"What are eugenic analyzers?"

Devi-en had manufactured the phrase by analogy with what he knew of the wild one's language. Now he said, carefully, "We direct matings and sterilizations to remove, as far as possible, the

competitive element in the remnant of the survivors."

For a moment, he thought the creature would grow violent again.

Instead, the other said in a monotone. "You make them docile, you mean, like these things?" Once again he indicated the Mauvs.

"No. No. These are different. We simply make it possible for the remnants to be content with a peaceful, nonexpanding, nonaggressive society under our guidance. Without this, they destroyed themselves, you see, and without it, they would destroy themselves again."

"What do you get out of it?"

Devi-en stared at the creature dubiously. Was it really necessary to explain the basic pleasure of life? He said, "Don't you enjoy helping someone?"

"Come on. Besides that. What's in it for you?"

"Of course, there are contributions to Hurria."

"Ha."

"Payment for saving a species is only fair," protested Devi-en, "and there are expenses to be covered. The contribution is not much and is adjusted to the nature of the world. It may be an annual supply of wood from a forested world; manganese salts from another. The world of these Mauvs is poor in physical resources, and they themselves offered to supply us with a number of individuals to use as personal assistants. They are extremely powerful even for large-primates, and we treat them painlessly with anticerebral drugs…"

"To make zombies out of them!"

Devi-en guessed at the meaning of the noun and said, indignantly, "Not at all. Merely to make them content with then-role as personal servants and forgetful of their homes. We would not want them to be unhappy. They are intelligent beings!"

"And what would you do with Earth if we had a war?"

"We have had fifteen years to decide that," said Devi-en. "Your world is very rich in iron and has developed a fine steel technology. Steel, I think, would be your contribution." He sighed. "But the contribution would not make up for our expense in this case, I think. We have overwaited now by ten years at least."

The large-primate said, "How many races do you tax in this way?"

"I do not know the exact number. Certainly, more than a thousand."

"Then you're the little landlords of the Galaxy, are you? A thousand worlds destroy themselves in order to contribute to your welfare. You're something else, too, you know." The wild one's voice was rising, growing shrill. "You're vultures."

"Vultures?" said Devi-en, trying to place the word.

"Carrion-eaters. Birds that wait for some poor creature to die of

thirst in the desert and then come down to eat the body."

Devi-en felt himself turn fault and sick at the picture conjured up for him. He said, weakly, "No, no, we *help* the species."

"You wait for the war to happen like vultures. If you want to help, *prevent* the war. Don't save the remnants. Save them all."

Devi-en's tail twitched with sudden excitement. "How do we prevent a war? Will you tell me that?" What was prevention of war but the reverse of bringing about a war? Learn one process and surely the other would be obvious.

But the wild one faltered. He said, finally, "Get down there. Explain the situation."

Devi-en felt keen disappointment. That didn't help. Besides—He said, "Land among you? Quite impossible." His skin quivered in half a dozen places at the thought of mingling with the wild ones in their untamed billions.

Perhaps the sick look on Devi-en's face was so pronounced and unmistakable that the wild one could recognize it for what it was even across the barrier of species. He tried to fling himself at the Human and had to be caught virtually in midair by one of the Mauvs, who held him immobile with an effortless constriction of biceps.

The wild one screamed. "No. Just sit here and wait! Vulture! Vulture! *Vulture*!"

It was days before Devi-en could bring himself to see the wild one again. He was almost brought to disrespect of the Archadministrator when the analysis of the mental makeup of these wild ones was made.

Devi-en said, boldly, "Surely there is enough to give some solution to our question."

The Archadministrator's nose quivered, and his pink tongue passed over it meditatively. "A solution of a kind, perhaps. I can't trust this solution. We are facing a very unusual species. We know that already. We can't afford to make mistakes. One thing, at least—we have happened upon a highly intelligent one. Unless—unless he is at his race's norm." The Archadministrator seemed upset at that thought.

Devi-en said, "The creature brought up the horrible picture of that—that bird—that—"

"Vulture," said the Archadministrator.

"It put our entire mission into such a distorted light. I have not been able to eat properly since or sleep. In fact, I am afraid I will have to ask to be relieved—"

"Not before we have completed what we have set out to do," said the Archadministrator firmly. "Do you think I enjoy the picture of—of carrion-eat—You *must* collect more data."

Devi-en nodded, finally. He understood, of course. The Archadministrator was no more anxious to cause a nuclear war than

any Human would be. He was putting off the moment of decision as long as possible.

Devi-en steeled himself for one more interview with the wild one. It turned out to be a completely unbearable one, and the last.

The wild one had a bruise across his cheek as though he had been resisting the Mauvs again. In fact, it was certain he had. He had done so numerous times before, and the Mauvs, despite their most earnest attempts to do no harm, could not help but bruise him on occasion. One would expect the wild one to see how intensely they tried not to hurt him and to quiet his behavior as a result. Instead, it was as though the conviction of safety spurred him on to additional resistance.

These large-primate species were vicious, vicious, thought Devi-en sadly.

For over an hour, the interview hovered over useless small talk, and then the wild one said with sudden belligerence, "How long did you say you things have been here?"

"Fifteen of your years," said Devi-en.

"That figures. The first flying saucers were sighted just after World War II. How much longer before the nuclear war?"

With automatic truth, Devi-en said, "We wish we knew," and stopped suddenly.

The wild one said, "I thought nuclear war was inevitable. Last time you said you overstayed ten years. You expected the war ten years ago, didn't you?"

Devi-en said, "I can't discuss this subject."

"No?" The wild one was screaming. "What are you going to do about it? How long will you wait? Why not nudge it a little? Don't just wait, vulture. Start one."

Devi-en jumped to his feet. "What are you saying?"

"Why else are you waiting, you duty—" He choked on a completely incomprehensible expletive, then continued, breathlessly, "Isn't that what vultures do when some poor miserable animal, or man, maybe, is taking too long to die? They can't wait. They come swirling down and peck out his eyes. They wait till he's helpless and just hurry him along the last step."

Devi-en ordered him away quickly and retired to his sleeping room, where he was sick for hours. Nor did he sleep then or that night. The word "vulture" screamed in his ears, and that final picture danced before his eyes.

Devi-en said firmly, "Your Height, I can speak with the wild one no more. If you need still more data, I cannot help you."

The Archadministrator looked haggard. "I know. This vulture business—very difficult to take. Yet you notice the thought didn't

affect him. Large-primates are immune to such things, hardened, calloused. It is part of their way of thinking Horrible."

"I can get you no more data."

"It's all right. I understand. Besides, each additional item only strengthens the preliminary answer; the answer I thought was only provisional; that I hoped earnestly was only provisional." He buried his head in his grizzled arms. "We have a way to start their nuclear war for them."

"Oh? What need be done?"

"It is something very direct, very simple. It is something I could never have thought of. Nor you."

"What is it, your Height?" He felt an anticipatory dread.

"What keeps them at peace now is that neither of two nearly equal sides dares take the responsibility of starting a war. If one side did, however, the other—well, let's be blunt about it—would retaliate in full."

Devi-en nodded.

The Archadministrator went on. "If a single nuclear bomb fell on the territory of either of the two sides, the victims would at once assume the other side had launched it. They would feel they could not wait for further attacks. Retaliation in full would follow within hours; the other side would retaliate in its turn. Within weeks it would be over."

"But how do we make one of them drop that first bomb."

"We don't, Captain. That is the point. We drop the first bomb ourselves."

"What?" Devi-en swayed.

"That is it. Compute a large-primate's mind, and that answer thrusts itself at you."

"But how can we?"

"We assemble a bomb. That is easy enough. We send it down by ship and drop it over some inhabited locality—"

"Inhabited?"

The Archadministrator looked away and said uneasily, "The effect is lost otherwise."

"I see," said Devi-en. He was picturing vultures; he couldn't help it. He visualized them as large, scaled birds (like the small harmless flying creatures on Hurria, but immensely large), with rubber-skinned wings and long razor-bills, circling down, pecking at dying eyes.

His hands covered his eyes. He said shakily, "Who will pilot the ship? Who will launch the bomb?"

The Archadministrator's voice was no stronger than Devi-en's. "I don't know."

"I won't," said' Devi-en. "I can't. There is no Human who can, at

any price."

The Archadministrator rocked back and forth miserably. "Perhaps the Mauvs' could be given orders—"

"Who could give them such orders?"

The Archadministrator sighed heavily. "I will call the Council. They have all the data. Perhaps they will suggest something."

So after a little over fifteen years, the Hurrians were dismantling their base on the other side of the Moon.

Nothing had been accomplished. The large-primates of the planet had not had their nuclear war; they might never have.

And despite all the future horror that might bring, Devi-en was in an agony of happiness. There was no point in thinking of the future. For the present, he was getting away from this most horrible of horrible worlds.

He watched the Moon fall away and shrink to a spot of light, along with the planet, and the sun of the system itself till the whole thing was lost among the constellations.

It was only then that he could feel anything but relief. It was only then that he felt a first tiny twinge of it-might-have-been.

He said to the Archadministrator, "It might all have been well if we had been more patient. They might yet have blundered into nuclear war."

The Archadministrator said, "Somehow I doubt it The mentalic analysis of—"

He stopped, and Devi-en understood the wild one had been replaced on his planet with minimal harm. The events of the past weeks had been blanked out of his mind. He had been placed near a small, inhabited locality not far from the spot where he had been first found. His fellows would assume he had been lost. They would blame his loss of weight, his bruises, his amnesia upon the hardships he had undergone.

But the harm done *by* him…

If only they had not brought him up to the Moon in the first place. They might have reconciled themselves to the thought of starting a war. They might somehow have thought of dropping a bomb and worked out some indirect, long-distance system for doing so.

It had been the wild one's word picture of the vulture that had stopped it all. It had ruined Devi-en and the Archadministrator. When all data was sent back to Hurria, the effect on the Council itself had been notable. The order to dismantle the base had come quickly.

Devi-en said, "I will never take part in colonization again."

The Archadministrator said, mournfully, "None of us may ever have to. The wild ones of that planet will emerge and with large-

primates and large-primate thinking loose in the Galaxy, it will mean the end of—of—"

Devi-en's nose twitched. The end of everything; of all the good Hurria had done in the Galaxy; all the good it might have continued to do in the future.

He said, "We ought to have dropped—" and did not finish.

What was the use of saying that? They couldn't have dropped the bomb for all the Galaxy. If they could have, they would have been large-primate themselves in their manner of thinking, and there are worse things than merely the end of everything.

Devi-en thought of the vultures.